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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ALMATY NOTES, NOVEMBER 26 - DECEMBER 7, 2007

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¶1. The "Almaty Notes" series is intended to maintain focus on developments in civil society, the media, and the opposition in Kazakhstan's "southern capital" following the move of the Embassy to Astana.

Kazakh Nationalists Are Against Formation of Kazakhstani Nation

¶2. At a round table in Almaty on December 4, a group of Kazakh nationalists spoke out against a recent proposal by President Nazarbayev to support tri-lingualism (Kazakh, Russian, and English) and promote the idea of a broader "Kazakhstani" nation. According to these representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia, this is a hastily-conceived and wrong idea and putting it into practice could lead to irreversible consequences. Burikhan Nurmukhamedov of the Ak Zhol party contended that national self-identification is important for ethnic Kazakhs and a failure to take this factor into account may worsen inter-ethnic relations. (TV Channel 31, December 4)

Utkin Loses His Case against City Election Commission

¶3. On November 23 the Almaty city court ruled for the city election commission in a case filed by independent Maslikhat candidate Sergey Utkin. Utkin challenged his loss to Nur Otan candidate Serik Kusainov in the August 18 election to the Almaty Maslikhat. Utkin provided the court with protocols from polling stations which he said confirmed his victory. At an earlier hearing in the Bostandyk district court, all members of precinct election commission number 184 testified that Utkin's protocols were accurate, casting doubt on the accuracy of the protocols produced by the city election commission. However, an examination conducted by city court experts reportedly confirmed that signatures on the city election commission's protocols were authentic. (Respublica weekly, November 30)

NGO's Urge Transparency in Mazhilis' Activities

¶4. At a round table in Almaty on November 27, a number of NGO's, including the Human Rights Bureau, Adil Soz, the Charter for Human Rights, and Almaty Helsinki Committee, announced their intention to set up an NGO coalition to promote transparency of the Mazhilis' activities and to provide public oversight over the work of parliamentarians. Mazhilis deputy Nikolay Turetskiy admitted that there was no mechanism for the publication of roll-call voting in parliament and no mechanism for keeping parliamentarians properly accountable before the electorate. Tamara Kaleyeva of AdilSoz complained that parliament does not put texts of draft laws on its web site and provides no information on the reasons a draft law is

rejected. "There is no feedback and there are no e-mail addresses. It is impossible to reach any deputy through the web site," Kaleyeva said. Evgeniy Zhovtis contended that Parliament needs to pass a law on access to information which would further cooperation between state agencies and citizens and would make officials accountable for not providing information. (Interfax, November 27)

Reasons for Political Apathy

15. "The main reason for apathy is that people do not believe they can change anything in the country through their actions," True Ak Zhol party co-chairman Oraz Zhandosov opined in an interview with Dozhiveym do Ponedelinka. "It is an interesting question why people do not go to rallies and do not protest against inflation and against the government's inaction in curbing soaring prices. These people are used to the practice we had in the Soviet Union when nothing depended on public opinion". (Dozhiveym do Ponedelinka weekly, November 30)

NGO's and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

16. At a conference in Almaty on November 27 entitled "Oil Revenues - Under Control of Society," a coalition of NGO's proposed revisions in Kazakhstan's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The coalition would like to enlarge its delegation in the National Council, which is composed representatives of extractive industry companies, the government, parliament, and NGO's. In addition, the coalition proposes to make National Council meetings more transparent by placing announcements in the press and reporting about its activities in the mass media. (Interfax, November 27)

Allegation of Violation of Detainees' Rights

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17. On November 26, the Human Rights Bureau issued a statement calling on the Almaty office of the Committee for National Security (KNB) to stop violating the rights of detained individuals, especially the right to an attorney. According to the Bureau, Rishat Musayev and Sergey Tsoy have been kept in Almaty KNB pre-trial detention centers since July 9 with no access to their chosen attorneys. Despite agreements the attorneys signed with the two detainees and the fact that they have state secret clearances, the attorneys have been denied meetings with their clients. Instead, the KNB invited other attorneys recommended by investigators to meet with the detainees.

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